

# River Then, River Now, River Future – Red Mountain Freeway Mural Public Art Project Fact Sheet



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Photo: Craig Smith

**Title:** River Then, River Now, River Future - Red Mountain Freeway Mural

**Location:** Mounted on the south-facing retaining wall of the 202 Freeway, adjacent to the Rio Salado bike path on the north bank of Tempe Town Lake, between Mill Avenue and Rural Road.

**Artists:** Jeff East and Rebecca Ross

**Assistants:** Michelle Lowe, Amy Rey, Cyndi Salter and Rand Smith

**Completion:** 2000

**Medium:** Handmade ceramic tiles and photo-silkscreened ceramic tiles attached to 54, 10-foot Dryvit panels bolted to the freeway walls

**Description:** The 545-foot long mural project consists of more than 15,000 handmade tiles, and is the result of four years of involvement from the Tempe community. An estimated 3,500 participants, ranging from school-aged children to senior citizens, created small and large collaborative tiles. The imagery represents the past, present and future of the Salt River area, and its history, natural habitat and future development. Viewed from a distance, the mural panels create a colorful ribbon of movement along the lake. Up close, the tiles reveal a vast array of images—animals, desert life, faces and names. In addition to the handmade tiles, photo silk-screened tiles were created using photos of the area selected from the Tempe Historical Museum. Contemporary photos by Rebecca Ross were reproduced onto ceramic tiles to characterize the present and imagined future of the area.

**Funding:** This project was funded through Tempe's municipal arts fund with additional funding from the Arizona Commission on the Arts' A.P.P.L.E. Corps program and the KidZone after school program.

**Artist biography:** Jeff East is a ceramicist and teacher at McKemy Middle School. His work has been exhibited throughout the United States in more than 50 exhibitions. Rebecca Ross has received numerous awards for her photography including a Visual Arts Fellowship and Artist Project Grant from the Arizona Commission on the Arts and public art commissions for the cities of Phoenix and Scottsdale. Her work is included in a number of major art collections including the Museum of Fine Arts-Houston and the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at University of Texas-Austin. She was selected 2002 Artist Educator of the Year by the Scottsdale Cultural Council for her work with disadvantaged youth.

**Artist statement:** This project was designed to involve children from the five elementary schools nearest the site in an effort to garner community buy-in and create "young citizen protectors" of the completed mural that was one of the first completed projects included in the development at Tempe Town Lake. The education component of the project grew to include involvement from groups such as Pueblo Grande Museum, Tempe Historical Museum and the Southwest Center for Education in the Natural Environment. As Tempe students and community members were learning about Tempe's history and creating tiles to celebrate the imagined future of city life with the lake, artist Jeff East said, "I believe the mural itself will become a part of Tempe's history. When these kids get older, I hope they will bring their children to see it."